

goes to file their tax return only to be told by the Internal Revenue Service that someone else has already filed their return and claimed their hard-earned tax refund.

□ 1615

Tax return identity theft wreaks emotional and financial havoc on hardworking taxpayers and costs the Federal Government billions of dollars.

According to a recent Treasury Department report, the number of stolen tax return refunds skyrocketed in just the last year—going from approximately 1.1 million stolen returns in 2011 to more than 1.8 million in 2012—a 69 percent increase. And the cost to the U.S. Treasury and the American taxpayers is staggering—nearly \$9 billion in just the last 2 years and \$21 billion in the last 5 years, Mr. Speaker.

We cannot allow billions of taxpayer dollars to be stolen from hardworking Americans and from our Treasury. This will only get worse unless we act.

We also must protect the thousands of taxpayers that fall victim to this crime, many of whom are vulnerable groups like seniors, veterans, and minors. Seniors in my south Florida community have been particularly hard-hit by this crime, and I simply couldn't stand by and let it continue.

Even though victims of tax return theft eventually are reimbursed by the U.S. Treasury, it can take many months and a lot of frustration to set things straight. Many of these victims rely on a timely tax return just to pay the bills.

These tax return identity thieves hide behind a veil of technology by stealing Social Security numbers and filing false electronic returns where the payoffs are almost instantaneous. Right now, more thieves and criminal organizations are turning to this lucrative crime because law enforcement lacks the kind of stiff criminal penalties afforded many other forms of identity theft. In this instance, technology has simply outstripped the enforcement tools currently on the books. The STOP Identity Theft Act brings together several measures to strengthen criminal penalties and increase the prosecution rate of tax return identity thieves.

First, this bill amends the identity theft statute to increase the maximum penalties for the crime of tax return identity theft. Right now, this crime is seen as low risk and high reward for would-be thieves. Toughening sentencing for tax return identity thieves will help deter this kind of crime.

The legislation also expands the definition of "identity theft victim" to include businesses and charitable organizations. Often, these organizations have their identities stolen and they are used in "phishing" schemes to extract the sensitive information from unsuspecting taxpayers used in tax return thefts. These thieves then use the harvested information to file thousands of fraudulent tax returns.

This amendment to the identity theft statutes will ensure that thieves who misappropriate the identities of any business, be it a small business or a nonprofit organization, can be prosecuted. The STOP Identity Theft Act also calls for better coordination between the Department of Justice and State and local law enforcement to make the most efficient use of the law and resources.

My own local law enforcement agencies in south Florida have been inundated with crime reports of tax return identity theft, and they need all the help we can provide.

This legislation is not the end-all, be-all to the congressional efforts to combat tax return identity theft, but it is a strong, bipartisan beginning. It is intended to provide targeted tools to law enforcement right away so that they are better prepared before next tax season rolls around.

Finally, the legislation also calls for DOJ to report back on trends in tax return identity theft, on progress in prosecuting these crimes, and recommendations for additional legal tools to combat it.

Information and data on trends about tax return identity theft can be valuable tools to detect and prevent future fraud, and it will inform Congress of additional legislative actions that will help in the effort.

I also send a big thank you to the various organizations that have supported and helped craft this legislation, including the National Conference of CPA Practitioners, the Committee for Efficient Government, the American Coalition for Taxpayer Rights, the Council for Citizens Against Government Waste, and the National Association of Counties.

Together, we all must ensure that Federal laws keep pace with emerging crimes such as tax return identity theft. It is time to make the prosecution of this crime a greater priority. The STOP Identity Theft Act is an important step towards this goal, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. GOODLATTE) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 744, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 19 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1730

#### AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. COLLINS of New York) at 5 o'clock and 30 minutes p.m.

#### MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT AMENDMENTS

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3109) to amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to exempt certain Alaskan Native articles from prohibitions against sale of items containing nonedible migratory bird parts, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3109

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. EXEMPTION FROM PROHIBITIONS FOR ALASKAN NATIVE ARTICLES CONTAINING MIGRATORY BIRD PARTS.

Section 2 of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. 703) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(c) EXEMPTION FOR AUTHENTIC ALASKAN NATIVE ARTICLES OF HANDICRAFT OR CLOTHING.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provisions of this Act, nothing in this Act prohibits possession, offering for sale, sale, offering to barter, barter, offering to purchase, purchase, delivery for shipment, shipment, causing to be shipped, delivered for transportation, transport or causing to be transported, carrying or causing to be carried, or receiving for shipment, transportation, or carriage, any authentic Alaskan Native article of handicraft or clothing on the basis that it contains a nonedible migratory bird part.

“(2) LIMITATION.—This subsection shall not apply with respect to any handicraft or clothing containing any part of a migratory bird that was taken in a wasteful manner.

“(3) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

“(A) ALASKAN NATIVE.—The term ‘Alaskan Native’ means any Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo who resides in Alaska.

“(B) AUTHENTIC ALASKAN NATIVE ARTICLE OF HANDICRAFT OR CLOTHING.—The term ‘authentic Alaskan Native article of handicraft or clothing’—

“(i) means any item that is—

“(I) composed wholly or in some significant respect of natural materials; and

“(II) produced, decorated, or fashioned by an Alaskan Native, in the exercise of traditional Alaskan Native handicrafts, without the use of any pantograph or other mass copying device; and

“(ii) includes any weaving, carving, stitching, sewing, lacing, beading, drawing, or painting described in clause (i), or any combination thereof.”

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentleman from California (Mr. LOWENTHAL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alaska.